[46] Chapter 3

Political, Administrative, and Judicial Organization of the Mossi Empire

I. Political and Administrative Organization

643 The Mossi empire of Ouagadougou was governed prior to the period of French occupation by a supreme chief, the Mogho Naba, who was revered by all his subjects as a "god" and whose territory, in the minds of his people, had no limits. He had the power of life and death over all his subjects.

[192] The word mogho means "country of the Mossi," but by extension it also means "the world." Thus, in this sense the Mogho Naba was regarded as the master of the world.

643 631 It is said that he had under his rule 333 chiefs, naba, among whom were his ministers, the three sogon'kassemsé (great servitors), and some forty petty chiefs called kougzindba, which refers to the heaps of stones designating the place of each minister or petty naba in the emperor's court.

643 177 The authority of the Mogho Naba over his vassals. In spite of the claims made by a colonial official who was trying to free the canton chiefs of one of the administrative districts of the colony from the authority of the Mogho Naba, the emperor's power never was merely nominal. If it has become so, it is a consequence of the intervention of French [47] administrative authority in the politics of the country -- an intervention which has resulted in assigning too much power to certain chiefs.

643 669 I do not mean to imply that before French penetration into the country there were not real conflicts, wars or mere skirmishes (1),

1. In Chapter 1 [not translated]we described in great detail the war waged by the Mogho Nabas Sanum and Wobgo against Lallé. We said also that Sanum warred with the Boussouma Naba and with Boulsa.

but the chiefs who tried by these means to free themselves from the emperor's authority were usually punished for their temerity.

oppose me. I therefore demand that his fez be returned to me." To take away the fez of a naba is to dethrone him and reduce him to the level of his subjects.

The court officials, including the Tansoba, at once send emissaries to the chief at fault, asking him to choose between suicide (some take a poison called sounadré, while others kill themselves with a poisoned arrow) and war with the Mogho Naba.

If the chief is not prepared for such a summons, he kills himself, and the envoys return with the news.

If, on the other hand, he declares that he wants pouwega, that is, war and a noble death, he sends back the representatives of the ministers. A few days later, with drums beating and the Tansoba, chief of the army, at its head, the whole warrior band appears before his walls.

The Tansoba sends the Samandé Naba to the chief to ask him to confirm his declaration of war. If the naba still wants war, he usually replies: "Ya yingri bala la ka sakénian."

The Tansoba withdraws, sending word to the chief [68] to expect him back on a stated day (seven or eight days later); this period of time will enable the chief to assemble his warriors also. When the day arrives, it is a merciless battle, a massacre.

Often the forces of the Mogho Naba are victorious, and in that event the slaves, livestock, and other property go to those who seized them. Only the corpses belong to the Tansoba.

If an arrow, even a poisoned one, wounds the Tansoba, he must under no circumstances pull it out. Indeed, he must often endure thirst and hunger, and it is only when he is at rest in an enclosed place that the arrows are removed from his body. It should be noted that since the Tansoba's costume is virtually covered with amulets and other charms, he is not very likely to be wounded seriously by an arrow. This is not, of course, to belittle his bravery and composure in the face of danger, since he is expected never to retreat and, if the enemy is victorious, often prefers to kill himself rather than to report a defeat to the Mogho Naba.

There are, in addition to the foregoing, a great many petty naba whose role is not clearly defined and of whom it seems needless to speak.

701 When a chief assembled his men, no one stayed behind. Only the
721 women, children, invalids, and old men guarded the villages. Those who had no horses formed the infantry; they were armed with bow
[411] and arrows, usually poisoned, and a large sword hung from the shoulder. The horsemen carried a sword and a spear that rested on the tip of the foot and was held at mid-height with the right hand. The Mossi cavalry was especially numerous and fearful. The Moro Naba stayed
[643] home when his people went to war. He gathered together as many horses as possible, and, when horsemen lost their mounts, they came to him to get another horse and rejoin the fight.

669 The last wars before the French conquest of Koupéla, which we shall describe briefly, were civil wars that took place either between the people of Tenkodogo and those of Koupéla, or between the Mossi and the Gourmantché.

669 /12/ As generally happened in parallel cases, these wars followed
643 the death of a naba, when several pretenders wrangled over the succession. It was in order to prevent such wars that only the immediate entourage of the naba was informed of his death. Outsiders were to remain in ignorance and believe the naba to be ill in his hut. The fatal news was spread only when the head of the family had gathered all that was necessary to honor the deceased in proper fashion by celebrating the kouré. (5)

5. Kouré, funeral ceremony in honor of the dead. See below.

669 When Naba Kidba died, leaving only a child of five or six to succeed him, a man from Kazem'bouanga who was powerful by virtue of his wealth and the number of his men decided to seize the throne. His followers had taken for themselves the name of Kazem'-bouanga and used to say: "Although the hyena (katré) is not the equal (zéma) of the donkey (bouanga), she nevertheless attacks and kills him if she meets him in the bush: similarly, although we are not as powerful as the inhabitants of Koupéla, we will manage to defeat them." And indeed, they marched on Koupéla. The prime minister, who bears the title, Saman'Naba (head of the outer courtyard), and whose own name was Wenkosgaraga, seized the child and fled with him to Sapara, the nearest village under the direct authority of the Moro Naba, located nine kilometers from Koupéla.

669 Having learned of this, the men from Kazem'bouanga proceeded to Sapara, but the inhabitants of the village refused to yield the child who had been entrusted to them; meanwhile, the Saman'Naba had returned to his province and gathered all the followers of the young naba. With the aid of the inhabitants of Sapara, the warriors of the Saman'-Naba cut to pieces the pretender's column, killed a great many of his men, and drove them back home. The Saman'Naba then took the child to Ouagadougou, had him invested by the Moro Naba, and returned to Koupéla. The child was Naba Ibri, father of the present naba, who was reigning in Koupéla when Lt. Voulet arrived. His defeated rival killed himself.

669 About the same time, on the death of his father Yenkouaré,
648 Batchandé was elected king of Gourma. Some of the villages, Gyékango among them, refused to recognize his authority. Batchandé appealed to the naba of Bélousa who rounded up his warriors and ordered them to join the men of the naba of Fada. Koupéla, a vassal province of Bélousa, took part in the expedition. Gyékango, however, was bravely defended by its chief and its inhabitants, who were favored by very propitious terrain covered with thorny scrub behind which the besieged men took cover to shoot on the Mossi. This was during the dry season. Thirst completed what the courage of the Gyékango people had begun, and many Mossi perished. The naba of Bélousa was so humiliated that he wished to die of thirst, but he was saved by the naba of Pwitenga. At this point Capt. Baud arrived in Fada from Dahomey. Batchandé requested his help against his rebellious subjects, and Capt. Baud seized Gyékango which has since been called Baudéni, "Baud's village."

A war waged in favor of Lébréboundou by the people of Koupéla against those of Tenkodogo /13/ has left vivid memories. Like the preceding, it was a civil war which broke out on the death of a chief. The naba of Tenkodogo having died, the elders elected Naba Korongo as his successor, but Lébréboundou attempted to seize power. He appealed to the people of Fada and to those of Koupéla. The naba of Tenkodogo, at bay, requested in vain the aid of the naba of Bélousa and that of the Moro Naba. Both replied that the winner would be recognized as chief. The men from Tenkodogo were driven back with losses, but this occurred just at the time when the French troops arrived. The elected naba of Tenkodogo appealed to the head of the expedition, who killed the pretender and installed the lawfully elected man in Tenkodogo.

669 The last wars in the Koupéla area, therefore, were all civil wars that broke out upon the death of chiefs in the adjacent regions of Koupéla, Fada, and Tenkodogo.

721 The most usual theater of warfare, however, was Bousanga /Busansi/ country. If a Bousanga woman enslaved to the naba of Koupéla ran away, the naba demanded her return. If his request was turned down, this meant war. When the Mossi ran short of millet, when their herds had been decimated by an epizootic disease, or even simply when they wished to obtain slaves, the naba would assemble his ministers and direct them to raid the Bousansé. The Saman'Naba would take [701] charge of the war. The Trabana, an experienced warrior, acted as chief of staff, and all the other chiefs, heads of cantons and villages; assembled their men. This was a festive occasion, and its abolition is still lamented by many people, especially among the chiefs.

721 Everything was looted; the harvest and herds were shared, and the 567 population was reduced to slavery. Since we have mentioned slaves, we shall provide some details on the subject.

567 Slavery existed in Mossi country, but in a very mild form. The agricultural Mossi kept slaves to till their fields. It was to their advantage to treat them well and thus turn them to good account. [435] Slaves constituted a source of wealth. An adult slave sold for 50 to 100 francs according to his strength, and no distinction was made between men and women. It was, therefore, unusual for a Mossi to kill a slave. Custom certainly sanctioned his right to do so, and no one, not even his chief, could call him to account for his act; his slave was his property, and he could do with him as he pleased. When he wished to get rid of a slave, however, he found it more lucrative to sell him. Besides, a slave should be attached to the household; a [278] maltreated slave might run away, even at the risk of being caught and in spite of the drug he was forced to drink, which, like the Lethean waters, was supposed to cause him to lose his memory. On the other hand, a well-treated, well-fed slave had the hope of obtaining a wife and becoming in turn the master of a hut. When his master was pleased with him, when he had rendered an important service, he was sometimes given one of the master's daughters in marriage; this made him free, and his children were not born slaves. Slaves could also be freed if their family agreed to redeem them. They were freed most frequently by means of an exchange: one of their daughters, sisters, or nieces was given in their place. This custom persisted until quite recently.

635 wear spurs and to have pages and a pillow. When the festivities are over at Kourit'Yaorin, the naba enters Koupéla where he is to reside.

643 When the Moro Naba died, the country fell prey to revolution and
669 to the servants of the deceased, who looted everything they could. This is why the death of the Moro Naba was carefully concealed until the day of the funeral; this is why, once it had been announced, no one dared go out without a bow and arrows or at least a spear. Women and children stayed home. In order to prevent any disorder, a new
643 election was called as soon as possible. The Widi Naba acted as intermediary and gathered the votes of the electors. The latter numbered twenty-five: the five high ministers and twenty other chiefs, of no great importance in everyday life, who were not canton chiefs and were often mere family heads, but who were high electors by right inherited from father to son since the founding of the Ouagadougou dynasty. These twenty-five electors consulted the people of their entourage and told the Widi Naba which candidate had received their vote. There could be several candidates, but to be elected one had to be a member of the family /22/of Naba Oubri, the founder of the dynasty. Once the funeral ceremonies were over, the Widi Naba rounded up all the canton chiefs and all the nabas present in Ouagadougou, and proclaimed the name of the man chosen, to whom he presented the badges of office. Numerous ceremonies followed, the most solemn of which took place in a small village called Paspanga, two kilometers from Ouagadougou. All the nabas went there in turn, beginning with the defeated candidates, to render their oath of loyalty.

All these customs were followed for the investiture of the present Moro Naba, Naba Kom.

Chapter 3. Rights of Chiefs and Rights of Private Individuals

631 The nabas, whether heads of villages, cantons, or provinces, were all-powerful, and no one could act without their knowledge or own anything beyond what they permitted him to possess.

In theory, Mossi country belongs entirely to the Moro Naba, who may dispose of everything as he wishes and give land to anyone he pleases. In practice, the Moro Naba delegates some of his

643 "Following the funeral ceremony, an electoral college consisting of the Ouidi Naba as president, assisted by the Gounga Naba, Laralé Naba, and Tamsaba, assembles in the greatest mystery and holds its meetings in a spot as withdrawn or inconspicuous as possible. Owing to the reigning state of anarchy, indeed, the followers of the various candidates would not fail to disturb the deliberations of the electoral college if they were to find out where it is meeting, and to support the candidacy of their respective favorites with arrow shots.

"When the members of the college have come to an agreement on the choice of the new sovereign (who can only be selected among the direct descendants of Oubry, founder of the empire) they secretly warn the chosen man, who also comes to them in secret. Then each of the four electors convokes his warriors, who come and gather around them and the new Moro Naba. On the following morning the informed populace flocks in, and the sovereign is proclaimed king.

"The disturbances of the interregnum come to an end from that moment.

"The Moro Naba, followed by the high dignitaries and the multitude, goes to Tamvilli (a quarter of Ouagadougou), where he spends the first day of his reign. When evening comes, he goes to the chief of the village of Ouagadougou where he spends the night. On the following morning he goes to Paspanga (a quarter of Ouagadougou) where, on the spot where the dwelling of Naba Kom once stood, he receives the canton chiefs and nakomsé, who come and render their oath of fealty. Finally, when this last formality is over, the members of the electoral college depart, and he proceeds along with the Baloum Naba, Kamsoro Naba, and Jussaba Naba to the royal residence.

"The unlucky /575/ pretenders are subjected to the most cruel banter throughout the coronation ceremonies, but once these are over they become kourita, or in other words the highest-ranking nakomsé.

643 669 "We have already stated that as soon as the Moro Naba is proclaimed sovereign, the disturbances of the interregnum come to an end. Mossi history records but a single case where the decision

643 of the electoral college was not accepted by the populace and dis-
669 turbances occurred in spite of the proclamation of the king-elect. This was when Naba Sagha, the son of Naba Kom, was chosen. The people would have liked to see Kaoko, son of Naba Zombéré, nominated. Dissatisfied because the sovereign of their choice had not reached the throne, they would not acknowledge the man chosen by the college. The new monarch managed to take over the throne only after waging a bloody battle at the head of his followers against his unlucky rival.

645 The province chiefs who are ministers are nominated by the
635 Moro Naba, who selects the man most deserving of the succession among the closest relatives of the chief to be replaced. Province chiefs enjoy considerable power in the administration of their provinces, they are surrounded with a large court, but they stand under the direct control of the Moro Naba.

635 It must be added that aside from the five provinces lying under the direct rule of the Moro Naba of Ouagadougou, there were four others (Boussouma and Béloussa to the northeast, Yako to the northwest, Tenkodogo to the southeast) that were mere vassal provinces and that actually enjoyed nearly complete autonomy prior to our occupation. Tenkodogo province was especially important.

The chiefs of these /latter/ provinces were true monarchs selected in the same fashion as the Moro Naba by the electoral college of their province. Once elected, they enjoyed all the prerogatives of sovereignty, nominating the canton chiefs and administering their provinces as they saw fit.

Their power was as absolute in their own sphere as that of the Moro Naba over the whole of his subject provinces, but they ac-
[631] knowledged his sovereignty and offered him a gift as a token of their vassalage at the time when their powers were handed over to them.

/576/ Within the subject provinces, the canton chiefs were
634 nominated by the Moro Naba on the basis of an introduction by the
624 province chief. They were always selected among the closest relatives of the chief they were to replace, always descendants of Oubry, the first Moro Naba. They stood under the direct orders of the province chief, whom they had to use as an intermediary to communicate with the Moro Naba. It was their task to proceed with

9:Skinner E-5 (1955-1957)1960 FA28 Mossi FA28

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN PATTERNS OF SUCCESSION TO POLITICAL OFFICE AMONG THE MOSSI OF THE VOLTAIC REPUBLIC*

ELLIOTT P. SKINNER

643 A characteristic of kingship shared by early European monarchies and many African societies has been the hazardous interregnum. In Europe this period was a time of shifting loyalties, intrigues, and bargained alliances; and the people's cry "the king is dead long live the king" was uttered without pause as if to abolish a hiatus that made them uneasy. The European monarchy later developed a strength and stability which enabled a king to pass on succession quietly to his heir. In African societies where the political power of the court was not strong, and the line of succession was not clearly delineated, the attempt was made to avoid a hazardous interregnum by keeping the people ritually ignorant of the death of a king. Only when the electors were ready to choose his successor were the people told of their monarch's demise. Even then, there was some real or ritual violence as the [662 669] numerous candidates vied for the vacant office.[1] Africans have themselves interpreted these stormy interregnums as being valuable for their societies. According to Oberg, in the Ankole Kingdom of Uganda, "The Bahima demanded that the strongest of the king's sons should be their leader and that the test should be one of war. The brothers must fight among themselves until one of them alone remained alive in Ankole Kingdom of Uganda to claim the drum and the mugabeship."[2] Other African populations believed that violent interregnums served to convince the people that a ruler was necessary. The Mossi of the Western Sudan was one of those societies which had a difficult interregnum. [121] In this paper I shall try to show that this pattern coinciding as it did, with a flexibility of succession to power among the ruling group, enabled this population to elect capable rulers before European conquest, helped them to insure the continuity of the ruling dynasty under European domination, and is now serving them in good stead during a period of transition to effective independence

*This paper was read at the Meeting of the African Studies Association held in Boston in September, 1959. It is based upon field work conducted in the Voltaic Republic under the auspices of the Ford Foundation African Studies Program (1955-1957). The author alone is responsible for its contents.

9:Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1960 FA28 Mossi FA28

chief. If he was not qualified then one of his younger brothers, or one of father's brothers or uncles was chosen. Yet, the fiction of equal access to the *nam* was important to the Mossi because it enabled them to adhere to their most important political axiom which was that "The only man who should rule is one who can keep the country." Regencies were avoided, and persons with physical and character defects were barred. Moreover, this flexibility gave the electors a wide choice of candidates from which to choose the person best fitted for chieftainship at any given period. The Mossi have always believed that it is difficult to rule men and this is what they mean when they declare: "Nanamsè toumdè ya yida fa fa"—"The work of the chiefs is the most difficult of all."[3] For example, it does not seem like an accident that the first ruler, Moro Naba Wubri, was succeeded by four of his brothers in turn instead of by his sons. The Mossi had not completely conquered the territory, and the young sons were incapable of handling the complex political situation. The graves of each of the successors to Wubri in different parts of the country remain as markers to testify to the difficult task which the early rulers had in controlling their realm.

The Mossi believed, and still do believe, that it was only when conflict developed after a ruler died, that the people realized how necessary and valuable a chief was. The death of a chief, especially of the Moro Naba, was kept a secret until the war minister arrived at the capital with his troops. Only then did the cry go up: "The fire has gone out!"; and as soon as it was heard, violence broke out throughout the land. Prisoners were released, thieves rifled the markets, and the *nakomcse*, or nobles, rode about the countryside doing whatever they wished. This custom persisted as late as 1942. Reporting to his superior in Abijan about the events that transpired in Wagadougou when Moro Naba Kom died, the French commander wrote: "On Friday, March 13, 1942, young people, profiting from old custom, tried to steal things, but they were stopped and about one hundred were arrested."[4] Throughout all the chaos which attended the death of a king, the war minister remained calm unless an attempt was actually made to seize power. He never attempted to stop the public disorder or to catch thieves or murderers, because everyone believed that out of

9:Skinner E-5 (1955-1957)1960 FA28 Mossi FA28

645
696 all the chaos would come a new appreciation for the task of the chief, and a cessation of the grumbling that the chiefs were greedy.

662
428
666 The Mossi interregnum also served another purpose. It gave the electors the opportunity to exhaust and redistribute much of the patrimony of the dead ruler, which was brought to them by his heirs who were trying to obtain the chieftainship through bribery. Sometimes, a candidate's ability to collect a great deal of goods with which to press his suit often revealed to the electors the strength of his following in the district or village, for had he been an unpopular man he would have had to use only his own resources.

666
643
175 The Mossi electors were always concerned with the health and character of a potential chief, and turned down the most promising candidates who were deficient in any of these qualities. For example, when Moro Naba Sanum died in 1890 without leaving a male heir, his younger brother, Bokary Koutou, was the strongest candidate for the *nam*. Yet he was passed over, at first, by the electors because of his reputation as a bandit and a rebel. We know from Captain Binger, a Frenchman who met Bokary in 1888, that this prince was indeed a bandit and a slave raider. But Binger, although deploring Bokary's conduct, exonerated him on the grounds that the Moro Naba had sent him into exile without any means of support. This was true, but the
[687] reason that Moro Naba Sanum did so was because Bokary had raised a rebellion against him as an attempt to obtain their father's position. Bokary was forbidden to appear in the capital; but when he heard that his brother Sanum was dead, he took a force of soldiers and hurried to Wagadougou fearing that an attempt would have been made to prevent his election. When he found that his fears were justified, he became
[669] desperate and secreted a force of Gurunsi warriors around the elector's meeting place, threatening to kill them if he was not named Moro Naba. They succumbed to his threat and he received the *nam*. During
643
175 the customary speech in which a new ruler chose his official name, announced his program for the people and the country, or ridiculed his erstwhile competitors, Bokary Koutou said: "A hundred ghosts cannot frighten an elephant (Wobogo)," meaning that he was not afraid
648
721
175 of any of his enemies. He thereafter became known as Moro Naba Wobogo, and he chose to live up to his boast when the French arrived and asked him to sign a treaty of protection with them. He refused

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

required mature rulers, or an uncle may have vanquished a nephew by physical prowess or force of character.

The pretenders to the Mossi nam began to press their claims as soon as propriety allowed. They presented gifts to the Ouidi Naba and to the other ministers in an attempt to sway the issue. The Ouidi Naba finally called a secret council composed of the Gounga Naba, the Larhalle Naba, the Kamsaogho Naba, and the Tansoba, and recited to them the following formula: "The country does not have a chief, and it needs one. Among all the people who wish to be elected [*di nam*, "eat the nam"], it is for you to choose the most worthy."[14] To this the councillors responded: "Naba! You are our superior, and the right to make the choice rests upon you alone." Thus given a free hand, the Ouidi Naba chose the most capable candidate. However, before announcing his choice, he said to the Tansoba, "My heart is heavy because I fear that those persons whose hopes have not been fulfilled will resort to violence to get their way." The Tansoba responded, "That will be against tradition and justice. Do not fear. I am here with my army to see that your decision is respected." Having received the support of the Tansoba, the Ouidi Naba announced his choice to the other councillors. They said to him, "Naba! You have expressed our will, and that of all the people." It is not to be understood from these formulas that the other councillors had no voice in selecting the candidate. They did in fact advise the Ouidi Naba concerning the best candidate, but these formulas emphasized that it was the Ouidi Naba, as prime minister, who was responsible for the choice.

The Ouidi Naba's choice of a new Mogho Naba was kept secret until the successful candidate was summoned for investiture. This occurred on the second night of the late Mogho Naba's funeral ceremony. Toward nightfall, the Ouidi Naba secretly dispatched a messenger to summon the successful candidate. The need for secrecy was demonstrated in 1891, when Boukary Koutou forced the committee to name him Mogho Naba. The circumstances were as follows: Mogho Naba Sanum died without male issue, and all his brothers vied for the nam. One of them, Boukary Koutou, was felt to be ineligible because he had been exiled for leading a civil war against Sanum, but like his brothers he hastened to Ouagadougou. Boukary feared that the electors would not look favorably upon his claim, and when he failed to ascertain their intentions he decided upon a *coup d'état*. He gathered an army composed of his supporters and his Gurunsi slaves, and surrounded the compound in which the electors were gathered. One of the electors discovered the army during a break in the deliberations and reported his findings to the Ouidi Naba. The chief minister and his aides

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

knew that Boukary Koutou was the only person capable of such a conspiracy. Fearing for their lives if they did not nominate him, they immediately sent a messenger to summon him as the successful candidate.[15] Under normal circumstances, however, there was no coercion of the ministers and the nominee was quietly brought to the councillors.

Wearing a pair of trousers and a sheepskin mantle and carrying a spear in each hand, the nominee entered the courtyard of the compound through the women's door.[16] He was preceded by the Samande, Nabila, who sprinkled the earth with water. He came up to the councillors and saluted them, and the Ouidi Naba addressed him as follows: "Before your father [brother] died, did he designate you to be his successor?" The nominee replied, "No, Sire! My father has left you free to choose whom you wish, be he a blind man or a leper!" This question was asked three times, and the nominee responded three times. The Ouidi Naba then made the following declaration: "I am giving you the nam of your father and grandfathers. You must try to conduct yourself as they did when they had the nam." The Ouidi Naba then listed the names of the territories over which the ruler had absolute power and authority. The new monarch raised his two spears in the air, made a speech in which he announced three guiding principles by which he vowed to reign, and "named a name," that is, suggested the title by which he wished to be known. For example, Mogho Naba Sagha II (1942–57) said in his inaugural speech: "Without rain, there is no life. I will be like rain for the country." He then became known as Mogho Naba Sagha ("Rain"), a rather fitting title for a ruler in a country with uncertain rainfall. The present Mogho Naba stressed in his inaugural speech (in 1957) that he was "solid as a rock." His official title is now Mogho Naba Kougri ("Rock").[17]

The taking of a new name was only the first step in the elaborate process through which a man became Mogho Naba. Next, the Ouidi Naba took the two spears from the new monarch and removed his sheepskin mantle. Then he gave him his new white clothes, which included a pair of trousers, a bonnet, and a sleeveless robe, all made for him by the people of the Sculougou ward in the capital. Next, he was given a cushion made by the people of Baramimi. The Baloum Naba then took the closely guarded namtibo, the sacred amulets of the dynasty, and used them in the preparation of a potion of millet beer mixed with millet-flour water, part of which was poured as a libation to the earth goddess, Tenga.[18] The ruler and the assembled ministers all partook of the potion in a kind of communion. The ministers then shook the ruler's hand, an act thereafter forbidden, and departed for their own compounds. The newly elected

643 763 [645] [793] the Tansoba, the members of the royal sub-lineage, and the district chiefs. The Tengsoba of the Ouagadougou area was also notified. Because he was a descendant of the aboriginal Ninisi population that "owned" the land, he supervised the burial ceremony.

[701] The Mogho Naba's death was kept secret, and no mourning was allowed until the Crown Prince had arrived at the capital and the Tansoba had recruited an army to protect the realm against would-be usurpers of power. Then the cry was raised in the palace, to reverberate throughout the land, 643 764 669 that "the fire had gone out." Once the ruler's death had been announced, the country was plunged into an interregnum, which was characterized by ritual and often by actual anarchy. The people in the towns immediately looted the markets and stole their neighbors' goods; the prisoners and captives in stocks were released by their guards; the nakomce in all the territories, districts, and villages subjected the local populations to robbery and pillage; and the members of the monarch's babissi began their intrigues for power. The traditional sanction for this anarchy was that only when people suffer during the breakdown of political control do they really appreciate the sovereign's role. The Mossi declare (with some truth) that no one was safe during the interregnum. However, as we shall see, the ruler was symbolically kept alive, and the country was never without effective political leadership.

766 644 643 When the Tengsoba arrived at the palace, he was joined by five hereditary funeral chiefs: the Pazany'tengsoba, the Tampouy Naba, the Benghin Naba, the Toghin Naba, and the Tanghin Naba. In the ceremony that followed, he gave permission for the royal grave to be dug. Meanwhile, the ruler's body was prepared for burial in the traditional manner by his female relatives and laid in state in the zongo. These women kept vigil over the body, shouting and weeping. Only the five ministers of the realm and the male members of the ruler's babissi were allowed to pay homage to the corpse within the zongo. All other mourners had to pay their respects to the monarch's eldest daughter, who, as Napoko, was dressed in the dead sovereign's clothes and sat in his place before the zongo. As her father's symbolic representative, she held daily court and received greetings and homage from all visitors until a new ruler was chosen. The drummer who sat by her side declared to all visitors, "You say that the Mogho Naba is dead! Well, who is that sitting there? Tell me! Is that not the Mogho Naba?"

766 643 [782] The ruler was buried the day after he died, at the end of an elaborate ceremony. Libations were poured out to the ancient rulers, and sacrifices made to them. All the important officials and members of the royal mini-

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

634 The Kombere Naba, as the person who had "eaten the nam" of the district, was infused with some of the power and authority of the Mogho Naba and had the right to use force to maintain this power and authority. He was [576] respected, and people uncovered their heads and removed their slippers in his presence. Unlike the Mogho Naba, the Kombere Naba was permitted to eat with his peers. But whenever he drank the musicians made a roar-like sound with their instruments, and when he sneezed his attendants clapped. These rituals were rigidly adhered to because the Kombere Naba was readily accessible to the populace and might easily have lost their respect if he behaved in an undignified manner. He emphasized his social distance from them by never visiting the market place, and he did not go anywhere without a large entourage.

The Kombere Naba performed ceremonies and duties that were similar to but simpler than those of the Mogho Naba, and he was surrounded by officers bearing the same titles as those in the capital. But, as will be shown later, these officials had fewer and sometimes different duties than the courtiers at Ouagadougou. Some district chiefs had as many pages and wives as the Mogho Naba, but this was as much a result of their own desires as of their popularity with the local people. The death and funeral rites of a [766] district chief were not as elaborate as those of a Mogho Naba. They included [788] the circumambulation of the chief's compound by the principal heir and heiress, the symbolic reign of the Napoko, and the banishment of the Kourita.[41]

634 778 [622] Every district chief, whether a Mogho Naba's vassal or a Dim's subordinate, was empowered to bestow the nam on his own subordinates. These might be other district chiefs; but most often they were village chiefs. The circumstances under which a Kombere Naba received the authority to grant the nam to another Kombere Naba were usually complex and sprang from rebellions and dynastic changes. Once granted, this authority was seldom revoked, but the district chief had to report to his immediate superior, a Mogho Naba or Dim, whenever he wished to confer the nam upon another district chief.

634 175 669 778 In some cases the Mogho Naba invested a district chief himself, and afterward placed him under the control of a neighboring district chief. For example, the chiefs of two districts, Vooko and Nobila, were always installed by the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou, but were supervised by the Nobere district chief. This practice dates back to the civil war involving Mogho Naba Sagha I (ca. 1787–1803), in which chiefs of Vooko and Nobere sided with the loser. The Mogho Naba executed the local rebels and placed one of his sons in Nobere. He then divided Vooko into two districts, placing a younger son in the one he called Nobila (little Nobere) and subjecting him

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

to the control of his brother at Nobere. The other district, still called Vooko but now half its former size, was given to a descendant of its deposed ruler. The relationship between these two rulers and the Nobere Naba was that of vassals and lord. They did not stand up in the presence of the Nobere Naba, but knelt or sat on the ground and uncovered their heads in respect to him. The Nobere Naba traditionally appointed the village chiefs in the Vooko and Nobila districts; however, he sometimes granted that right to the two district chiefs. Furthermore, the traditional provincial administrator could not transmit any orders to those two district chiefs without first notifying the Nobere Naba. In their everyday affairs the two chiefs were autonomous, but the Nobere Naba could challenge and countermand all their actions. Actually, he did seem to exercise greater control over Vooko than over Nobila. One may even say that the relationship between the Nobere district chief and the Vooko chief was like that between the Mogho Naba and his district chiefs, and that the relationship between the Nobere Naba and the Nobila Naba was comparable to the one between the Mogho Naba and the Dimdamba. We have seen that the Dimdamba claimed equality with the Mogho Naba because of their alleged descent from a putative common ancestor. The Nobere Naba was actually more closely related to the Nobila Naba than to the Vooko Naba, and his behavior toward them reflected this fact. In both cases, the relationships involved were determined by the concept of joint possession of the nam by the ruling family.

A district chief was not required to notify his superior when he wished to confer the nam upon a village chief. In this choice he was completely autonomous and subject only to tradition. The fact is that on the district and village levels, traditions were more frequently modified in the face of practical political and socio-economic considerations. This occurred primarily because the district chief had closer relations with persons who possessed goods and services or who controlled them directly than did the chiefs on higher levels. Secondly, he was often under great temptation to allow presents or bribes to affect his choice of subordinate chiefs.

When a Tenga Naba died, the district chief permitted control of the village to revert to its Tengsoba. If there was none, the village was "given" to the eldest man among the aboriginal Ninisi lineages or to the eldest member of the ruling lineage segment. However, none of these persons was considered anything but a trustee of the village, and even when the trustee was a potential candidate for the nam, the Mossi did not feel that this man had any advantage over his competitors. Whoever held control of the village was held responsible for its affairs by the district administrator until the new chief was elected.

Competition for chieftainship on this level was very keen because of the

against the Mogho Naba. I say "allegedly" because it was never quite clear whether the district chief was at fault or whether the Mogho Naba wanted to replace him for dynastic reasons. For example, Tanga, a district chief, was accused by Mogho Naba Sanum (1850-90) of withholding tribute and of maladministration. The Ouidi Naba who administered Tanga's district advised him to prove his innocence by making a sacrifice on Naba Oubri's tomb, and then go to Ouagadougou and ask the Mogho Naba's forgiveness. Tanga agreed to do so. But it appears that the Mogho Naba, who wished to place his own father's brother in Tanga's place, did not want a reconciliation. He waged war on Tanga, and seized his relatives, retainers, and cattle. Tanga tried to regain his losses by appealing to his provincial minister, but the minister told him that the Mogho Naba had distributed the livestock and had sold the people to Hausa traders. Moreover, he informed Tanga that he could not help him because the Mogho Naba could do as he pleased. Tanga thereupon decided to take matters into his own hands. He successfully attacked the Mogho Naba's villages, and was still a rebel when the French arrived shortly afterward.[28]

Tanga's action was unusual, for district chiefs seldom risked rebelling against the Mogho Naba when accused of maladministration. In 1895, for example, Koabga, chief of Doulougou district in the province of the Gounga Naba, took poison rather than wage war when Mogho Naba Wobogo accused him of misgovernment. Usually, a district chief who disobeyed an order of the Mogho Naba was summoned to the capital to answer the charge of lese majesty. If he was found guilty, the ruler knocked the bonnet off his head, thus deposing him, and had him strangled. The Mossi seldom spilled royal blood. A district chief who refused to go to Ouagadougou could either kill himself (traditionally by taking arsenic) or resort to civil war.[27] If he chose suicide, he was given an honorable burial as though he had died naturally. If the Mogho Naba sent down an army, however, the offending chief was invariably killed. His compound was burned, his slaves and cattle were seized, and his allies and immediate relatives were compelled to flee. The strength of this tradition is borne out by Tanga's case. He had successfully resisted the attempts of two Mogho Nanamse to bring him to heel, and was still at large when the French conquered the country. But Ouidi Naba Koabga, who had deserted his sovereign and selected Kouka Koutou as Mogho Naba under French orders, had not forgiven Tanga. When the French asked him what additional steps they should take to pacify the country, he asked them to capture Tanga. The unfortunate district chief was captured, placed on an unsaddled colt, and taken to Ouagadougou, where he was ignominiously executed.[28]

be related to her was tried and executed. In some cases, he was put to death without a trial. Adultery with a royal wife was considered so reprehensible that both adulterers were publicly beaten to death. Their bodies were denied burial and were thrown into the bush to be eaten by vultures. The Dapore Naba and the Baglere Naba seized and retained the man's property.

Men who committed treason against the Mogho Naba were usually killed before they could be tried. Chiefs and nobles who were suspected of treason and who consented to come to Ouagadougou for trial were deposed and executed if found guilty. Those who were found innocent were released and sent back to their chiefly duties. The sole exception on record to this general rule was the case of Naba Yemde, a Dim of Boulsa province. He had fought and defeated the forces of Mogho Naba Sanum, and when the Mogho Naba sent a larger army and routed him, he was treacherously delivered to the monarch by another Dim. Sanum found Yemde innocent of treason, but had him executed because he had violated another rule: as the descendant of a Kourita, he had come face to face with the Mogho Naba, thus jeopardizing the monarch's life. This exception is always cited by the Mossi when the inevitability of execution for treason is brought up. Actually, a person accused of treason rarely went to court. He either took poison or died in battle against the royal forces. As a posthumous punishment, his compound was burned, his property seized, and his relatives and servants sold into slavery outside the country. Thus, the supreme penalty was not merely the death of a traitor but the permanent banishment of his entire lineage.

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

WARFARE

628 642 643 175 [648] Yatenga Naba (and other rulers) or treading on his territory should not be overlooked. The suggestion that force was not the only consideration was lent force by later events. The French conquest later reduced the rulers of both Ouagadougou and Yatenga to impotence and obviated war between them, yet they did not meet until 1946—some fifty years after the conquest. They met then only because they had to represent their subjects at a meeting to plan the restoration of the Upper Volta and reunite all the descendants of Oubri and Ouedraogo into one territory.

Relative strength obviously played an important part in determining whether one Mossi kingdom interfered in the internal affairs of another. For example, when a Tenkodogo ruler asked a Mogho Naba to help him suppress Busansi subjects who had rebelled, the Mogho Naba readily complied.[14] But when a fratricidal struggle over the nam broke out in Tenkodogo in 1894, the Mogho Naba decided not to intervene even though he was asked to do so.[15]

628 643 669 175 The central governments of the various kingdoms found it necessary to wage war against their subordinate territories at regular intervals. In the Ouagadougou kingdom, most of these wars seem to have been administrative actions against a prince or district chief who had contravened an order from the Mogho Naba or refused to pay tribute. The Dimdamba were the Mogho Naba's most rebellious subordinates, and it was against them that he fought most of his wars. Characteristic of these wars was the series between Naba Ligidi (1866–90), Dim of Boussouma province, and Mogho Naba Sanum.[16] Ligidi had seized and turned over to the Mogho Naba the recalcitrant Naba Yemde, then Dim of Boulsa, and confiscated the rebel's property. Later on, when the Mogho Naba had made peace with Yemde's son, Naba Kiba, he asked Ligidi to surrender the seized property. Ligidi refused to do so, and the angry Mogho Naba sent the royal army into his territory. The army sacked and burned several villages and retreated. Ligidi's forces skirmished with the rear guard but abandoned pursuit near the Ouagadougou border.

Ligidi took his revenge by helping a district chief who had rebelled against Naba Kiba. While he was thus engaged, the royal army again attacked and defeated him. Four days later, it reinvaded Boussouma, engaged Ligidi's forces at a place called Goudri, and won a brilliant victory. Despite Ligidi's furious counter-attacks, the army captured his capital, Ouayougya. The ruler's army finally returned to Ouagadougou, satisfied that Ligidi was thoroughly beaten. But the Mogho Naba had underestimated Ligidi's tenacity. For the next ten years, this Dim waged war against his fellow Dimdamba. The Mogho Naba finally grew tired of his depreda-

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

tions and launched another expedition against Ouayougya. The expedition failed because of a lack of water, and the army was forced to return to Ouagadougou. The war would have continued had not both Mogho Naba Sanum and Ligidi died in 1890.

It appears that the Mogho Naba tolerated fighting among his immediate subordinates, and seldom intervened in local wars unless one of the combatants openly flouted his authority. For example, when the autonomous principality of Riziam attempted to wrest control of Salmetenga district from Boussouma province, Mogho Naba Doulougou did not intervene. He knew that Salmetenga owed allegiance to Boussouma, but was perfectly willing to allow its ruler to transfer allegiance to Riziam. When Boussouma was on the brink of defeat, the Salmetenga Naba fled to Ouagadougou to seek asylum. The Mogho Naba sent him back to Naba Piga, the Boussouma Dim, with the request that he be allowed to live. Piga was so angry with the chief that he ignored the Mogho Naba's request and executed him. This incurred the wrath of Mogho Naba Doulougou, and he sent an army to attack Piga. Fortunately for this disobedient Dim, the Mogho Naba died and the attack was called off.[17]

The reaction of Mogho Naba Koutou to fighting among his subordinates was more typical. He did not interfere in a long series of battles between the principalities of Riziam and Mane which culminated in 1866 when the Riziam people seized, imprisoned, and executed several Mane merchants who had gone to buy salt in Timbuktu. Mane appealed to its brother province of Boussouma for aid, and Riziam appealed to a Fulani chieftain for reinforcements. Before a battle could ensue, however, the Boussouma Dim, Naba Siguiri, died after drinking some millet beer, and the fighting was called off. Naba Kom of Mane then went off alone with his army, defeated the Fulani, and killed their chief, Sekki. When Ligidi (the chief mentioned above) succeeded his father, Naba Siguiri, he elected to continue the war against Riziam with the help of the Mane army, but the battle was inconclusive. The stalemate did not satisfy the bellicose Ligidi, who attacked Riziam once more in 1871, burning villages and seizing property. The Riziam people finally rallied and halted him. They ambushed his soldiers when they tried to retreat, and harried them so thoroughly that Ligidi had to call off the war when slaughter and thirst decimated his ranks.[18]

Similarly, Mogho Naba Sanum did not interfere when one of his own district chiefs, the Salogho Naba, was attacked and defeated by the ruler of Tema principality. Nor did he enter the fray when another of his district chiefs was attacked and defeated by the Boulsa Dim. The fighting in both

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

cases was over women. The Tema Dim successfully defended his principality against a Zittenga district chief who not only had the effrontery to demand the return of a wife who had fled into Tema but also invaded the principality when she failed to return.[19] The Boulsa Dim attacked and defeated the Salogho Naba when he refused to repatriate a man and woman convicted of adultery who had fled into his district. It is possible that in each case the Mogho Naba refused to become involved in a squabble over women, but it is more likely that he refrained from participating in a local war that did not threaten the security of the entire country.

Many Dimdamba made it a practice to help each other in wars against common enemies. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Naba Zende of Tema and Naba Totoabo of Yako joined in a war against Naba Sebogo of La when Sebogo refused to repatriate one of Totoabo's wives, who had fled into his territory. The two victorious allies burned villages in La and forced Sebogo to flee for his life. They searched for the woman, but she was never found. The successors of the three rulers remained embittered by this war and eventually renewed the fighting. On this occasion, Naba Tanga of Tema and Naba Sagha of Yako fought against Naba Kombase of La. But this time Yako and Tema were unable to defeat La and had to withdraw. There is no evidence that the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou took any part in these wars.[20]

The Mogho Naba appears to have taken a greater interest in wars between his Dimdamba and non-Mossi populations, and to have profited by them occasionally. When the followers of a Fulani chief named Karfo carried off some cattle belonging to the Boussouma people, the Boussouma Dim, Naba Siguiri, threatened war if the animals were not returned. Karfo not only refused to surrender the cattle but insulted Siguiri in his reply. Siguiri marched against the Fulani, killed Karfo, seized all the cattle he could find, and sent some of the "most beautiful animals" to Mogho Naba Koutou.[21]

Although the Mogho Naba tolerated wars among his Dimdamba, he apparently forbade the district chiefs under his direct command to fight among themselves. As we saw in Chapter IV, some such fighting did take place, but the Mogho Naba seems to have ignored it in most cases because of its relative unimportance. The Mossi, on the other hand, magnified this local fighting, which they called *tengkom* ("civil war"), and which consisted of mere skirmishes between villages or neighboring districts, with few casualties. In fact, the Gounga Naba once stopped a war between districts after only nineteen persons had died. But as a rule, districts seldom if ever fought among themselves. The actual combatants were villagers

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

who fought the villagers of other districts over stray livestock, stolen goods, and runaway women, in that order of frequency.

The main reason for these inter-village wars was the lack of local mechanisms (aside from meetings of district chiefs) to deal with problems between villagers of different districts. If the district chiefs refused to meet, they could either refer the matter to the provincial level or allow the villages to resolve the problem among themselves. Many district chiefs preferred the latter course because it saved them from interference by the authorities in the capital. Besides, these problems were usually unimportant and did not pit one entire district against another. People of different districts were often bound to each other by familial and ritual ties, and did not like to fight against relatives. Only when the potential combatants were unrelated or all attempts at reconciliation failed would the people of a village (and occasionally of a district) band together, either secretly without their chiefs or under their chiefs, and go to war. In such cases, persons who had relatives in the enemy villages often remained at home.

The inhabitants of Mossi districts did band together eagerly under their chiefs to participate in slave-raiding expeditions into non-Mossi territories. This type of warfare seems to have been fairly common. Ruelle writes, "Before our [French] occupation, warfare was the chief preoccupation of the chiefs. Moreover, expeditions into Gurunsi country had as their goal pillage and the procurement of slaves for sale."[22] Similarly, Mangin states, "The Gurunsi and Busansi were frequently raided with the sole intent of obtaining slaves."[23] Binger gives the following description of a Mossi slave-catching expedition and the subsequent disposal of the slaves:

> During my second stay at Banema, Boukary [later Mogho Naba Wobogo], knowing my aversion to pillage and slavery and fearing to displease me, sent off two expeditions during the night without warning me—one to Nabouli, and the other towards the south to Baouer'a. By six o'clock in the morning of the following day, the returning horsemen were heralded by gunshots. Soon afterwards, a line of slaves of both sexes appeared, tied to each other by a cord slung around their necks. The expedition to Nabouli brought back seventeen slaves; that to Baouer'a brought only five, along with an ass laden with salt and a little cotton. As soon as these unfortunate people arrived, they were given water to drink, and mallets were used to remove the rings and copper bracelets which they wore on their arms and legs. Then they were classified into three categories:
>
> 1. The men formed a lot destined for immediate sale for fear that they should run away. They were led forthwith to Sakhaboutenga, to be exchanged against sorghum for the horses, millet for the personnel, and gunpowder.
> 2. A second lot, composed of women, was kept as a reserve to trade for horses.

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

posted to alert the troops in case the enemy should attempt an attack at dawn. If the war was waged against foreigners, individual soldiers were allowed to keep a slave or a cow out of the booty; the remainder was divided between the district chiefs and the central government. In victorious civil wars against the enemies of the Mogho Naba, however, the entire booty was sent to the capital.

When the Mossi had to defend their own territory, their most common tactic was to evacuate the villages. This was the technique most often employed against invading French forces.[29] Other defenses included palisaded villages, barricades of fallen trees, trenches, and hedges, some with poisoned foot traps. Mangin reports that the Boulsa were defeated in their war with Fada-N'Gourma not only because their enemies fought valiantly, but also because they "were favored by very propitious terrain covered with thorny scrub, behind which the besieged men took cover to shoot on the Mossi."[30] Mangin does not say whether the scrub was poisoned, but his data indicate that this type of defense was common in the area. The Mossi say that the use of poisoned prickly plants (*silenage*) against invading forces dates back to the early conquest of the territory. Tradition recounts that Naba Oubri was unable to conquer Ouagadougou until his Ninisi wife advised him to shoe his soldiers against the poisoned foot traps of the aborigines.

Mossi wars or raids were usually limited to the dry season and stopped at the beginning of the planting season. Commenting on the war between Boulsa and Fada-N'Gourma, Mangin tells us: "This was during the dry season. Thirst completed what the courage of the Gyekango people had begun, and many Mossi perished."[31] Tradition recounts that it took Mogho Naba Waraga five successive years of attack before he defeated Ramzi, the rebellious chief of Riziam principality. He finally defeated him when his army attacked the province before its people had been able to harvest their crops and retire into an impregnable fortress for the dry season. Judging by the reports of European visitors, this type of dry-season warfare continued as late as the 1890's. For example, Crozat could not understand why the Mogho Naba did not send an army to defeat the chief of Lalle district, who had imprudently raided a village near Ouagadougou, and he concluded that the ruler did not have an army. The fact is, however, that Crozat was in Ouagadougou between September 9 and September 30, a period when the potential soldiers of the Mogho Naba had not yet harvested their crops. Had Crozat remained in Mossi country for three or four months longer, he would have seen the ruler's army in action; for, as a matter of fact, the Lalle Naba's attack on Mogho Naba Wobogo was but the latest episode in a prolonged struggle between the two rulers.

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

726 628 669 For several years Mogho Naba Sanum had tried unsuccessfully to corner and defeat the rebellious Lalle Naba. Then one dry season the Mogho Naba called his Tansoba and said to him:

> "I want you to assemble immediately an army composed only of courageous men, to go to Lalle and bring me, alive, Tanga [also called Wobogo], chief of that district." Several thousand men, eager for glory, were gathered, and the army advanced against Lalle. It managed to burn Siguele, Tanga's residence, but did not capture the chief, who had fled to Koudougou. The royal army would have pursued him, but because the rainy season was imminent, and the men were needed to work in the fields, the army returned to Ouagadougou with a considerable amount of booty. The king received his war minister very kindly, because he foresaw the impending defeat of his obstinate enemy. The Mogho Naba then said to his warriors, "Go and cultivate your fields, but remember that as soon as the harvest has been stored, you have to capture Tanga. Regardless of the cost, I must have him, even if all of you must die."[32]

Mogho Naba Sanum died before he could capture Tanga, and the task fell to his successor, Mogho Naba Wobogo, who fared no better. One dry season, the royal army chased the rebel into Gurunsi territory but failed to catch him. They would have continued the chase, but "it was during the rainy season, and the royal army was disbanded."[33]

[648] Mogho Naba Wobogo never succeeded in capturing Tanga, because the French came in and conquered the Mossi. Nevertheless, the rebel did not go unpunished. After the French had completed their conquest they asked the Ouidi Naba what steps should be taken to ensure peace. He told them to capture and kill the Lalle Naba. This unfortunate chief was hunted down, captured, placed on an unsaddled colt, and brought to Ouagadougou, where he was publicly humiliated and then executed.

701 726 The episode with Tanga and the limiting of warfare to the dry season indicate that the Mogho Naba did not have the resources to maintain a standing army, and, therefore, had difficulty exerting his authority by the use of force. There is no doubt that the Mogho Nanamse were able to gather very large armies at specific times against both internal and external enemies, but when the planting period came the soldiers had to attend to their crops. This lack of resources also limited the power and authority of Mogho Nanamse over their autonomous subordinates. As a result, the Mossi kingdoms remained segmentary in nature, and became highly organized only at certain periods of their history.[34] The availability of military resources thus had a significant effect on the nature of the Mossi governmental and political system.

because of this delinquency, the Mogho Naba might hesitate to come to the aid of any of his vassals if a general war broke out. It is true that the Mogho Naba did not aid the Yatenga ruler when the French arrived. But whether this was because of his failure to pay taxes, or because the French conquest of the Yatenga coincided with a civil war there, we shall probably never know. We do know that many of the Mogho Naba's vassals came to his aid when the French finally arrived at Ouagadougou. It is my opinion that the gifts exchanged between Yatenga and Ouagadougou were not "tributary," but were more in the nature of tokens of friendship between two peers.

The Mogho Naba and his provincial ministers also received revenue as a function of their judicial roles. The nature and disposition of the fines levied against legal offenders were discussed in Chapter V. The Mogho Naba's fees came in the form of the traditional gifts the litigants gave him even before their cases were tried. These gifts were never regarded as bribes, for this would have contradicted the Mossi axiom that "the truth is at Ouagadougou."

The Mogho Naba inherited all the property of the Kamsaogho Naba, and claimed all the property of district chiefs who died without close relatives. He also received inheritance taxes (fado) from the estates of deceased district chiefs. In collecting the fado, the Mogho Naba first retained the horse on which the messenger came to announce the chief's death. He reciprocated by sending envoys with cowries and animals to be offered to their common ancestors at the chief's funeral. After the funeral, the envoys claimed the dead chief's quiver of arrows to take to Ouagadougou for deposit with those of other dead chiefs. Then they demanded the fado, and jestingly told the heirs that the Mogho Naba would be satisfied with nothing less than "a thousand of everything" (*tusri bumbu fa*) the deceased had possessed: wives, slaves, horses, cows, goats, chickens, articles of clothing, and so on. The heirs pleaded poverty and jokingly gave the envoys a few old and sickly animals, old chickens, tattered pieces of clothing, etc. Eventually, they handed out the fado, which usually consisted of livestock, clothing, food, weapons, jewelry, cowries, and even slaves. Lastly, they gave the envoys the chief's ceremonial horse and presents for themselves.

The Mogho Naba and his ministers collected a considerable amount of revenue from the traders who visited Ouagadougou and the larger market towns and village markets throughout the kingdom.[6] The Mossi (especially the assimilated Yarse) were good traders, and they benefited from their country's strategic location between the Sahara and the forest regions. According to Barth, some six caravan routes crossed the country, linking

[P.126]

VIII

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

796
642 RELIGION AND RITUAL played an important role in supporting and preserv-
[769] ing the Mossi political system. Religio-political ceremonies were centered
[776] around the ancestors (Keemse) and the earth deities (Tengkouga); the
otiose high god (Ouennam or Naba Zid Ouende) had a very minor role.

769 The political importance of ancestor veneration lay in the fact that every
642 Mossi chief claimed Nyennega of Dagomba and her descendants, Ouedra-
778 ogo and Oubri, as his ancestors. Furthermore, possession of the amulets of
Rialle, Nyennega's husband and Ouedraogo's father, legitimized possession
[613] of the nam. In order to rule, a Moaga had either to be a member of a royal
lineage still in possession of the nam or to have received the nam from such
• 669 a lineage. No Moaga ever tried to usurp the nam of a kingdom or princi-
778 pality without trying to steal the royal amulets at the same time; nor, if his
642 rebellion was successful, did he ever fail to claim that he had stolen the
769 amulets or had received them as a gift. Thus Yadega, who rebelled against
his father's brother, Mogho Naba Koudoumie, and founded the Yatenga
kingdom, declared that he had obtained Rialle's amulets. He claimed that
they had been given to him by his sister, Pabre, who had stolen them from
Ouagadougou and had thus deprived that kingdom of any legitimate sanc-
tions for power. Thus, when the Yatenga people declare that they are equal
to Ouagadougou, they add that the only "amulets" that still legitimize the
nam of the Ouagadougou dynasty are the droppings left behind by Pabre's
horse as she fled northward.

769 Similarly, all the princes who founded principalities and proclaimed
642 their independence of Ouagadougou defended their action on the grounds
643 that they, being as close to the main line of descent as the Mogho Naba,
were also entitled to rule. The younger sons of deceased Mogho Nanamse
[631] who were banished from the capital as Kouritadamba and who subse-
quently became provincial Dimdamba also stressed their relationship to
[634] the royal ancestors. Even those district chiefs whose ancestors had prob-

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

None of these men reached Ouagadougou, however, and no treaties were signed.[54]

The events that eventually led to the fall of the Mossi had already occurred two years earlier in the Sudan, even before the last group of European agents tried to reach Mossi country. In 1893, the French defeated Ahmadou, the sultan of the Toucouleur, and captured Bandiagara, just north of Mossi country. Thus, when civil war broke out in Yatenga between Naba Baongo and a rebel noble, Bagare, the French were near enough to take advantage of the situation. Baongo journeyed to Bandiagara and sought the aid of France against his enemy. The French commander, Destenave, desiring to place the country under French protection and not wishing to become involved in local dynastic rivalries, tried to reconcile all the dissident elements. The Yatenga ruler rejected this offer and launched an attack against Bagare, but was killed during the ensuing battle. Bagare then became Yatenga Naba. Soon afterward, he became embroiled in a civil war with rival princes of the royal house and sought help from Destenave, who, according to Tauxier, "was awaiting an opportunity such as this to take a decisive action, which, starting with Yatenga, would have annexed all Mossi areas to our other Sudanese possessions."[55] In May 1895, the French troops accompanied Bagare to Yatenga, defeated the rebels, reinstalled him in the sacred town of Gourcy, and placed his realm under the protection of France. While still in Yatenga, Destenave allegedly sent a message to the ruler of Ouagadougou asking him to sign a treaty with France. Mogho Naba Wobogo reportedly replied:

> I had the oracles consulted a long time ago, and they all answered that if I should see a white man, I would be a dead man. I know that the whites want me to die in order to take my country. And besides, you (my friend) pretend that they are coming to help me organize my country. But I find my country very good as it is. I have absolutely no need of them; I know what is good for me, and what I need. Also, you should consider yourself fortunate that I am not having your head cut off. Away with you, then, and, above all, do not return.[56]

Destenave ignored this reply and pushed southward to the Ouagadougou territories. His small force met with such resistance at Yako that he retreated to his base at Bandiagara. Shortly afterward he returned to Paris and appealed to Colonial Minister Delcassé to send a strong military force to occupy Say (on the Niger River), Mossi country, and the surrounding area, and subject them to a military administration. Before Destenave could return, however, the commander of the Sudan, Lt.-Col. Trentinian, ordered Lt. Voulet to prepare the way for the occupation of Mossi country.[57]

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

With his staff, African infantry, cavalry, and bearers, Voulet left Bandiagara in July 1896 to conquer the Mossi and Gurunsi territories. As the column entered Yatenga it was hailed by Bagare, who had again been chased from his capital by rebel forces. Voulet allowed him to join the invading force, and together they proceeded to Gourcy.[38] According to French sources, the Mossi army offered only token resistance, and the people deserted their villages as the column advanced.[39] In contrast, local tradition states that the Mossi fought valiantly, and that heroes entrenched themselves along the way to die at their posts. However, the French eventually routed the defenders and reinstalled Bagare at Gourcy. Voulet then proceeded to Yako, and the population fled. After capturing this town, Voulet proceeded to Ouagadougou.

The events leading to the capture of the Mossi capital are not clear, because the official sources and the information culled from the memories of witnesses differ a great deal. Noll reports that Voulet sent an emissary to Mogho Naba Wobogo demanding the surrender of the town, and that the emissary was whipped for bringing bad news to the ruler and sent back to Voulet with a rejection of his demand. In the words of Noll, "That insult was immediately punished, and that same evening the French flag flew above the walls of Ouagadougou."[40]

One Mossi version, as related by Dim Delobson, is that a man named Seddo met Voulet's column and, after acting as its guide until nightfall, ran off and notified Mogho Naba Wobogo that the column would arrive at Ouagadougou the following day. The ruler's ministers then held a conference. Some of them counseled him to await the French and show them the flags and the treaty of protection they had received from the British. Others feared that if the Mogho Naba waited for the French, they might seize him, maltreat him, humiliate him before all the people, and probably kill him. They advised him to leave the country. Wobogo decided to be prudent and fled the capital.[41]

According to another tradition, a Moslem from Bere district who had been to Mecca and who had encountered Europeans told Wobogo that it would be folly for the Mossi to try to fight the gun-bearing invaders, and that he should either surrender or flee. The Tansoba who heard this statement became so angry that he wanted to kill the speaker. He declared that no man could enter Mossi country without the ruler's permission, and he swore to die before this happened. However, the other councillors persuaded Wobogo to leave the capital.

Dim Delobson states that Voulet arrived at Ouagadougou with his column in September 1896, and sent a former Gurunsi slave of the Mossi with

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

Voulet left Ouagadougou in February to establish French control among the Gurunsi, leaving a military commander, Captain Scal, and a Resident Officer at Ouagadougou. But he acted without taking into account the resourcefulness of Wobogo (now once more Boukary Koutou), who had gained the allegiance of chiefs in the Manga area. The Gounga Naba, who was provincial minister for that region, tried to gain the support of the Djiba and Rissouma districts for Mogho Naba Sighiri. He failed, and ordered the troops of Garanse, Nobere, Toise, and Yake districts to attack Boukary Koutou's supporters. In the ensuing battle the Gounga Naba's forces lost nine men, the rebels ten. The Gounga Naba considered these losses too high and called off the fighting.[46]

Meanwhile, Boukary Koutou had sent an appeal to Steward, the commander of a British force that was then on its march of conquest through Gambaga and that had designs on Ouagadougou, "for protection in virtue of the treaty concluded with Mr. Ferguson in 1894." Wishing to avoid conflict with the British, Voulet hastened to Tenkodogo in February 1897 to meet Steward, and the two men established boundaries between the French and British spheres of influence. Boukary Koutou was thus left to fend for himself.[47] Undaunted, he crossed the Gold Coast frontier once more and proceeded toward Ouagadougou. Scal heard about his activities and decided to launch an attack against him. He took Boukary Koutou by surprise in June 1897, and forced him to flee. Boukary passed through Bere district and arrived in the Gold Coast, where he was granted refuge by the British. About a year later, he convinced a Colonel Northcott that he had been unjustly deposed by the French, and that under the treaty of 1894 the British were his protectors and were obliged to restore him to his throne. In May 1898, a British force under Northcott and with Boukary Koutou in tow arrived at Kombissiri, some twenty-five miles from Ouagadougou, but here they were met by French emissaries who brought with them copies of the treaty of protection signed by Sighiri in January 1897. The British troops retreated, taking the dejected ruler with them into permanent exile.[48] Boukary reportedly settled at Zangoiri, a few miles from Gambaga.[49] He was forbidden to enter Gambaga because of the tradition that if he ever saw the Gambaga ruler, both of them would die. Boukary never returned to Mossi country. He died and was buried in the Gold Coast in 1904, but his funeral was held at Ouagadougou.[50]

Boukary Koutou is seen in retrospect as a tragic figure, whose main fault seems to have been that he ruled at the most difficult time in his country's history. Judging by his treatment of Binger, he appears to have been a clever politician, but his resources were of no avail against the

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964

FA28 Mossi FA28

[Post World War II Period]

175* 643 648* 578

It will be well if the Mogho Naba understands that he owns but the vestige of a past whose hour has irrevocably tolled, and that his message to the President of the Council [de Gaulle] commits no one in the Upper Volta but himself, a mere citizen like the others.

I deplore the discrimination which the message of the Mogho Naba implicitly contains. I should like to say to the Mogho Naba that in the Upper Volta there are no Mossi, Fulani, or Bobo people, but only Black people struggling for their liberty. No Mossi or any other Voltaic would agree to the Mogho Naba's expression of fidelity to France in his name. If this must be done, then the Territorial Assembly and the Government Council alone are qualified to do so.[42]

Despite these attacks and numerous suggestions in the press that the Mogho Naba and the Mossi chiefs were developing a "Touré complex" (i.e., the fear of suffering the same fate as the Fulani chiefs of Fouta Djallon, who had been deposed by Sékou Touré, Vice-President of the Guinea Government Council), the Mossi ruler actively supported acceptance of the constitution of the Fifth French Republic, which promised the colonies full internal self-government within the "French Community." Since the constitution was adopted by the Upper Volta population by an overwhelming favorable vote of 99.1 per cent, no one could estimate how effective the Mogho Naba's support had been.[43] [177] [642]

Coulibaly died just before the referendum, and was replaced on an interim basis by Yaméogo. The parliamentarians accordingly had to choose a new leader, now to be President of the Government Council, as well as to draw up a constitution for the new republic and determine whether it would join any of the regional federations then being considered by several territories. The Territorial Assembly was scheduled to meet in extraordinary session on October 17, 1958, to select a successor to Coulibaly. The Mogho Naba, anticipating dissension and perhaps once again seeking the limelight, sent a message to the representatives on October 15, urging "a government of union and public safety." But the politicians resented what they regarded as his interference in matters that did not concern him; few, if any, took his message seriously, and none replied. 175* 646 642 666 [643] [578]

The Mogho Naba therefore decided to force the issue. He summoned his traditional ministers to a conference, and, despite the objections of the Baloum Naba, obtained their permission to order his Tansoba to muster his warriors and lay siege to the Territorial Assembly. Early in the morning of October 17 about 3,000 Mossi warriors, armed with bows and arrows, swords, spears, and ancient flint guns, converged on the Assembly. Later that morning, the Mogho Naba himself, accompanied by his Tansoba, 175* 643 669 578

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28
[Post World War II Period]

arrived on the scene, dressed in his dark-brown cotton war cloak and his war bonnet, the symbol of his power. The demonstration lasted until 11 A.M., when the French Army undertook to scatter the warriors. Finally, the Ouidi Naba ordered the warriors to return to the palace. Only then did Max Berthet, the High Commissioner, open the Assembly session with an expression of regret for the "unacceptable and incomprehensible" demonstrations.[44]

The Assembly adjourned that afternoon and did not meet again until October 20. In the interim, the parliamentarians took measures to deal with this challenge to their power. On October 18, the Government Council issued a communiqué "stigmatizing Friday's demonstration." The Council regretted that the demonstration had prevented a democratically elected body from sitting, but affirmed that "order and public security, indispensable to everyday life, will be maintained."[45] On the following day a longer communiqué was issued, declaring that a truce had been signed by the authorized representatives of the Union Démocratique (Voltaic section of the RDA) and the Mouvement de Regroupement Africain (Voltaic section of the PRA) after a three-day meeting in Ouagadougou. According to the communiqué, the two groups had agreed that "the unity of the democratic forces of the country" was "the decisive question of the hour."

The Territorial Assembly met in Plenary Session on October 20, and on the basis of the political truce, 68 representatives unanimously elected Maurice Yaméogo as President of the Government Council. The politicians further showed their disdain for the Mogho Naba by adopting the following motion:

> The Territorial Assembly, in the unanimous assurance that it alone has the mandate of the Voltaic people to legislate in their name, solemnly declares that, in the face of all opposition, it will work to give the Voltaic State democratic institutions conforming to the aspirations of the population, within the framework of the constitution which they approved by such a strong majority on September 28. Furthermore, it is insistent in its demands that the authorities responsible for public order do everything in their power to determine the persons responsible for the demonstration and to see what should be done to avoid a recurrence of such an event.[46]

The Mogho Naba soon found to his chagrin that even some of his own vassal chiefs had turned against him. They had been persuaded by the politicians that the French Government would never allow the Mogho Naba to take over the country, and furthermore that he had overstepped his bounds and had thereby endangered further the institution of the chieftainship. The Bureau of the Syndicate of the Traditional Chiefs of

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28
[Post World War II Period]

the Upper Volta met, discussed "the affair of October 17," and issued a statement dissociating itself from the Mogho Naba's action, reaffirming its desire to collaborate with the established authority, and requesting a clarification of the status of chiefs in the new order. The Government Council of the Upper Volta welcomed this statement, and hastened to reassure the chiefs that their status was not in danger: "It is not a question of damaging the traditional chiefs as a group, but rather of stigmatizing vigorously an act emanating from a superior chief like Mogho Naba Kougri, the consequences of which, unforeseen as they were, could have placed all the Mossi chiefs in a regrettable and irreparable position."[47]

The Mogho Naba had obviously reached a political impasse, and he next turned his attention to creating a new image of the chieftainship. To this end, he married a young Mossi woman in accordance with the civil statutes of the state, thus becoming the first Mogho Naba and the first important Mossi chief to do so. A spokesman at the wedding placed this act in its proper perspective with the following words:

> I should now like to underscore the fact that this date, November 22 [1958], will be inscribed officially in the annals of the Upper Volta. For the first time in the history of our country, an Emperor, the person who best symbolizes tradition, has upset ancestral habits in the interest of progress. For the first time a woman will be given consideration in a royal court where she will be able to feel at her ease. For the first time, the spouse of a traditional chief will have her place near her husband as an equal and steady companion.[48]

The politicians were apparently prepared to recognize the eminence of the chiefs as long as they did not attempt to intervene in the affairs of the state, and a number of them attended the Mogho Naba's wedding. Among those present were the Presidents of both the Government Council and the Territorial Assembly, parliamentarians from various parties, and the mayors of Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou. On December 10, 1958, the Territorial Assembly confirmed Yaméogo as President of the Government Council. The Assembly also approved his slate of ministers, among them Bouda, the Mossi chief who had once been a strong supporter of the traditional political hierarchy but who now belonged to the UDV-RDA. Then, on December 11, the Assembly decided to adopt the draft of a proposed constitution for the Upper Volta. Articles 2 and 3 of Paragraph I of this constitution state explicitly:

> The Republic of the Upper Volta is one and indivisible, secular, democratic, and social. Its principle is that the government is *of the people, by the people, and for the people. . . .*
>
> *Sovereignty belongs to the people. No section of the population, and no individual, may usurp it.* [Italics mine.][49]